

*Washington, DC* - Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today called on the Delaware River Basin Commission to conduct an environmental impact study on the cumulative effects of natural gas extraction water withdrawals. The study, Hinchey argued, should occur before the commission considers any water withdrawal applications.

"With natural gas companies lining up to to withdraw water from the Upper Delaware River Valley for their hydraulic fracturing operations in Pennsylvania, it's important that a cumulative impact analysis be made," Hinchey said. "Over 15 million people rely on the Delaware River Basin for clean drinking water and millions more enjoy its scenic views and recreational offerings - we have to make sure we get this right. While permitting water withdrawals on an individual or incremental basis for a limited number of applications might not threaten the basin's resources, a large volume of applications is expected in the near future and the projected use and diversion of Basin water must be scrutinized in a comprehensive way."

Hinchey continues to be a leading voice in the effort to protect drinking water and the environment from the risks of hydraulic fracturing. In March, the EPA announced that it had initiated a study on the environmental risks of fracking based on legislative language Hinchey authored. Last year, Hinchey, Congresswoman Diana DeGette (D-CO), and several of his colleagues introduced the FRAC ACT -- Fracturing Responsibility and Awareness of Chemicals Act, which would close the loophole that exempted hydraulic fracturing from the Safe Drinking Water Act and require the oil and gas industry to disclose the chemicals they use in their hydraulic fracturing processes.

The full text of the letter to Executive Director Carol Collier is appended below.

April 29, 2010

Carol R. Collier, Executive Director  
Delaware River Basin Commission  
P.O. Box 7360, 25 State Police Drive  
West Trenton, NJ 08628-0360

Dear Ms. Collier:

I am writing in regards to the Commission's vital role in permitting surface water withdrawals from the Delaware River Basin for use in natural gas drilling in Pennsylvania and New York. As you are aware, the Upper Delaware River Valley is facing the prospect of significant numbers of new natural gas drilling sites in the Marcellus Shale formation, which will require the use of substantial amounts of fresh water over the course of the coming years. I am grateful for your agency's leadership on water withdrawal issues thus far, and I appreciate your announcement earlier last year that the Commission would require dockets for all water withdrawals from the Delaware River Basin for Marcellus Shale drilling.

I believe that natural gas needs to be part of our efforts to reduce our nation's dependence on foreign oil and transition away from more impactful fossil fuels. I also recognize the potential economic benefits of natural gas drilling. However, accessing those reserves must be done in an environmentally responsible manner with the proper safeguards in place to protect our water resources. Recent reports of groundwater contamination in Pennsylvania underscore the need to fully understand the risks to our water supplies from natural gas drilling.

Before the Commission considers applications for water withdrawals from natural gas extraction companies, I believe the Commission should conduct an analysis of the cumulative impacts that anticipated water withdrawals, along with activities associated with water withdrawals, are expected to have on the Delaware River Basin. This analysis will help ensure the protection of the Delaware River's "Special Protection Waters", which are recognized for their exceptionally high scenic, recreation, ecological, and water supply values.

Sustainable management of the water resources in the Delaware River Basin is critical to the continued well-being of the nearly 15 million people who depend on the basin for drinking water and other needs. While permitting water withdrawals on an individual or incremental basis for a limited number of applications might not threaten the basin's resources, it is quite clear from the substantial amount of lands under lease for gas drilling that we can expect a large volume of applications in the near future and that the projected use and diversion of Basin water must be scrutinized in a more comprehensive manner rather than in a piecemeal way. As you know, I am working with my colleagues in Congress to identify and obtain additional federal resources to assist the DRBC in conducting appropriate cumulative impact reviews, and I will keep you informed as to the progress in that regard.

I appreciate your consideration of these comments, and I look forward to continuing to work with you on this important matter. Please don't hesitate to contact me if I can be of any assistance in the future.

Sincerely,

Maurice D. Hinchey